

If I Crash, I'd Have Flown First by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: (doesn't post for three months. comes back to post whatever the hell this is), Animal Death, Fluff, Gen, Implied Violence, Modern AU, Trans Steve Harrington, background lesbian nancy wheeler, background trans dustin henderson, background trans lesbian barb holland, coz i suck at period stuff, i really do like this. i'm pretty proud of this but i have to post it now because it's gonna fade, im posting this after chugging no less than six monsters so my confidence has reached new heights, oh yeah uh, this is my first oneshot go easy on me, this whole thing is me projecting don't even fucking, tiny. small bit of angst, trans realization, uhhhh gun mention

Language: English

Characters: Barbara "Barb" Holland, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, thos are the only REAL main characters in this so whatever

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Summary:

Steve has been trying to be two different versions of himself his whole life, and he feels like he's been failing at both. Armed with the new realization that he may be a gay trans man, Steve navigates the pitfalls of coming out to his friends and trying to find self acceptance amongst it all.

(for clarification, this is based off of my own experiences as a mlm trans guy who once upon a time id'd as a lesbian for a long time because??? gender and sexuality are complicated dude your guess is as good as mine)

(Further clarification, Steve is referred to by he him pronouns and his chosen name from the getgo because it would have been weird if i

used she her pronouns and his deadname but *blows raspberry*)

If I Crash, I'd Have Flown First

There were a million “should have known” moments. He figured it was like that for a lot of folks. It wasn’t a happy moment, either, when the realization finally struck him. He was sitting at home and his fingernails were digging into his skin and he was listening to his “Dad Music” playlist on his phone while he listened to ‘Nance jaw about the dnd campaign her egghead little brother was running from his basement. She did not seem pleased at the fact that their group was growing and their campaigns ran even longer than ten hours now and the vents in the basement were an almost direct line to Nancy’s room. Steve supposed that he wouldn’t be too happy about that either, had he any siblings to provide such a nuisance.

“Do you wanna come over, or something? We could order pizza and watch movies?” he suggested. But he knew Nance and he knew that sometimes she would complain actually looking for a solution and other times she just wanted to complain, just to get it out of her system, just to keep from yelling AT her brother because she knew that he and his friends had enough of a hard time at school with the bullies pickin’ on them for being dorks.

“Nah, I’m okay. The tires on my bike are too thin. I’ve gotta get new ones,” Nancy answered. Just as he thought. But there was something else there, too. Usually Nancy could just say that she didn’t want to hang out, and Steve would be cool. He wondered if it was still a little weird between them.

“Nancy?” Steve asked.

“Yeah?” Nancy’s voice wavered with slight worry.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to be alone with me still. It took us this long just to be able to have a lengthy conversation on the phone,” Steve pointed out.

“Are you sure? I feel awful. I mean. What happened between you and me, that was almost over a month ago,” Nancy was raking her fingers through her hair, Steve could tell.

“How about you, me, Barb and that Jonathon guy go to the movies on Friday? We can see each other without the long awkward silences,” Steve caught his own eye in the mirror of his vanity.

“That sounds great,” Nancy beamed, “Talk to you later,” She said his name, and it seemed to grate his ears.

“Love ya, Nance,” Steve said warmly. He hung up the phone, and when he placed it in his pocket, he found that his eyes were still fixated on the mirror. It was the typical teenager’s bedroom vanity, complete with photos from various long tossed disposable cameras, strips from booths at the mall, so on, so forth. He was covering the bottom half of his face in almost all of them. Nancy and Barb thought it was cute. Steve thought it was ridiculous.

He approached the mirror, not taking his eyes off his own reflection. It didn’t even make sense to realize it then. There was nothing spectacular or even out of the ordinary about this. It was a typical Saturday night and the sight of his own face was making him clench his jaw and feel like he was unwelcome to look upon it.

Maybe it was the combination of hearing his own name, talking to Nancy for a while, and looking in the mirror. Maybe it was his overall appearance, hunched over in a baggy hoodie to hide his form. Or his hair clipped back and almost greased to the point of being a helmet. But there was nothing unusual about any of that really, he almost ALWAYS sat on the bed when on the phone, and the mirror was across from it. This time, though, something clicked. Finally, he understood. Finally things made sense.

“I’m a guy,” he said, mostly to himself, in absolute disbelief. And it felt true to say it, but it didn’t feel good. He felt like he was surrendering himself.

He was thirteen when he decided that he could NOT be straight. That much was true. Obvious, even. He thought the idea of being a man’s

bride was the most repulsive thing he could think of. This was one of those “should have known” moments. He decided he wouldn’t date. Thirteen. Fifteen when he decided that boys were gross and he was obviously a lesbian. There was exactly no way he would even CONSIDER being straight. Being called a boy’s girlfriend made him feel ill. He should have known from the point the label started fitting ill that something was off.

“Hey, are you okay?” Barb asked, waving a hand in front of Steve’s face. He grimaced. It was June. It was 90 degrees out, and he was wearing a tank top, because everything else he sweat through. He was exactly zero okay. It’s like, looking back, he knew he HAD been dysphoric without realizing it. But now that he realized it? It was amplified.

“Just sweaty,” Steve answered.

“This sucks ass,” Nancy said plainly. The entire group sighed in defeated agreement.

“your houses have air conditioning,” Jonathon pointed out, “we don’t have to stand here looking pissed at each other because it’s too hot out to force our muscles into smiles.”

Steve rolled his eyes, facing away from Jonathon. He was Nancy’s friend, and Steve tried to be as polite as he possibly could, but he kinda thought Jonathon was a pretentious weirdo. He called Steve’s dad playlist synth garbage and said classic rock was REAL music. He was one of the strongest contenders in Steve being in complete denial that he could be a guy, or attracted to them. Another contender was his friend Tommy, who spent his time calling women gross words and pretending to be the hottest guy in town. And then there was Max’s older brother, who made Steve’s skin crawl. A raging misogynist, homophobe, and an even bigger racist.

Every guy over thirteen that Steve knew was a jackass. Even he was a jackass at times, however hard he tried not to be. If the majority of guys weren’t assholes or worse, he might have considered the possibility of being one much sooner.

“Well, we can’t hang out at my house because my brother is

downstairs with his friends playing dnd,” Nancy argued, and suddenly Steve realized he hadn’t been paying attention. All eyes in the group fell to him.

“Uh,” he looked away, “I guess we COULD hang out at my house, but uh,” Steve’s room was in utter disarray since figuring it out. He was trying to get rid of any and all clothes that made him look, well, like a girl.

“But what?” Nancy blinked at him.

“But,” Steve shook his anxiety off, “but nothing. Let’s just hang out in my basement, alright?”

“Okaaaay,” Nancy gave him a weird look. She could tell he was hiding something.

It was the way his popular friends talked about trans people. It made him want to cry. And yeah, usually when one of them had a fucked up stance on something he would get angry and call them out on their bullshit. Not with this though. This made him want to stay holed away in his room. They said they hated when people changed their identities out of nowhere or that they respect trans people, but someone can’t control which names and pronouns somebody else used when that trans person is not present.

Carol and Tommy were careful not to talk a lot of bullshit about gay people because publically, Steve was seen as a cis lesbian. That was, after all, how he had identified since he was old enough for an internet connection. It got a little suspicious to his friends when he started staring at guys a lot. He worried they would assume he was a cis straight girl, given the circumstances. He had like fifty posters up in his room, and most of them were male musicians, and a reasonable portion were Kurt Cobain specifically.

“I like his music,” he defended himself when Nancy raised an eyebrow as he hung up another poster.

“Since when do you like grunge?” Nancy asked, “I might expect you to like some of Courtney Love’s stuff, maybe, but-”

“He was also just a cool guy in general,” Steve beamed up at the poster.

“Hey?” Nancy shoved her hands in her pockets.

“Yeah, Nance?” Steve braced himself.

“You can tell me if you only like guys, okay? I know straight people are ridiculous and weird and awful but you are one of my best friends. So it’s like, cool if you like guys,” Nancy said.

“I feel like I’m in one of those god awful ‘what if straight people were oppressed’ short films,” Steve groaned.

“Be serious,” Nancy slapped the back of his head.

“Being serious is against my religious beliefs,” Steve said. Nancy rolled her eyes.

“C’mon.”

Steve looked at his poster and not at her. It was the first time they hung out alone together since it happened. It was two weeks since Steve realized. He didn’t want to make it any weirder than it already was. He admired Nancy so much. She was so sure of herself. She hadn’t been friends with Carol and Tommy for long, but even when she was trying to be cool, she would always, ALWAYS call them out on their transphobic and homophobic bs.

About the time that she stopped giving a shit about how Carol and Tommy thought, she had come out as gay. Steve followed soon after. And when you’re two of the only gay people in school-

“Hey,” Nancy put her hand on his shoulder.

“What makes you think that I only like guys?” Steve asked, flinching slightly.

“Really?” Nancy frowned and gestured towards his collage.

“Okay, but why ONLY guys?” Steve half expected to defend himself.

“Well,” Nancy bit her lip, “I don’t want to say because of what happened with us, but...”

“It’s because of what happened with us,” Steve sighed.

“I figured you just weren’t attracted to me at first-which is fine-but then you decided you just weren’t gonna date for a while, then the posters. It’s just kinda. Weird. I guess,” Nancy explained, “or maybe I’m just being weird.”

It hadn’t ended because of the fact that when they got affectionate, it made Steve squeamish. It had ended because of the night Barb almost died. She was in the hospital for a week, and Steve kept saying how it was his fault, and Nancy kept saying absolutely nothing. He had been an asshole to Barb. His carelessness had nearly gotten Nancy’s best friend killed. There was a lot of crying, but not much yelling. Not at each other at least. Steve was the one to break up with Nancy. They’d been together a whole year. It changed things. And just because it didn’t end because of Steve’s weird aversion to contact, that didn’t mean it wasn’t a factor.

“You’re not being weird,” Steve clenched his jaw, “you’re right. I do like guys and only guys.”

“You’re straight. It’s no big deal,” Nancy smiled, “it actually explains.....a lot.”

“It’s complicated,” Steve looked out his window.

“Complicated how?” Nancy asked.

“Complicated like.....” Steve trailed off. Nancy was looking at him dead in the eyes. Did he really want to do this now? No. Did he trust Nancy more than anyone else? Yeah. “I’m trans.”

It was like falling into darkness, telling her. He searched her face for a change of expression. A sign. Nancy processed it finally.

“Cool,” Nancy smiled.

“Cool?” Steve straightened his back.

“Yeah,” Nancy said, “that explains a lot. Barb kinda figured.”

“Is it that obvious,” Steve grimaced.

“No!” Nancy put up her hands, “I didn’t mean it like that! Barb just kinda. She got, you know, the vibes.”

“The vibes?” Steve raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah.” Nancy must have realized she wasn’t making much sense, “You know, like how I figured out that Barb was a lesbian before she told me? I think gay and trans people can just sense each other. I know that’s like, nuts, and the concept of a gaydar is really outdated and rooted in homophobia and all that, but that’s kinda....”

“I think I get what you mean,” Steve assured her.

“Good. So, he him pronouns?” Nancy asked.

“Yeah,” Steve leaned against the wall.

“Are you out to anyone else?”

“Nope.”

“Considering a new name?”

“Definitely. I don’t know what yet, though.”

“Cool. Thank you for telling me. I feel closer to you now.”

“Ditto.” Steve beamed.

“Wanna go get a smoothie?”

“Yeah!”

And it was as simple as that with Nancy.

When it came in the mail, Steve looked at the package sitting on his bed for what must have been hours. Steve thought it might disappear if he blinked. His mother had it sat on the kitchen table, not knowing what it was but not grilling her son about it, knowing with teenagers, it's probably better not to know what's in the package. It was yellow and paper and it contained something Steve desperately wanted.

He tore the package open. He hoped they had sent the right size, he'd only measured about a thousand times before ordering. He stared at the item, enclosed in vacuum sealed plastic. He sighed, thinking of the daunting task that would be putting it on. Initially, he had wanted to ask Nancy over to help, but he felt he would be much too awkward. It would be, of course, just a little less awkward on his own.

He followed instructions he'd seen online. Initially it took him around 40 minutes to finally maneuver the thing over his chest. The safety guide said the first thing to do once he got it on properly was to make sure he could breathe. Looking in the mirror with it on, it was like he was breathing for the first time in a long time.

He looked at the pictures on his mirror. Then back at his reflection. What he saw was two polar opposite versions of the same person. He had since those photos cut his hair, not too short, styled very Teen Wolf ish. It was jarring to look at it next to the low messy ponytails presented in the photographs. Steve slipped a shirt over his head and frowned. It was now a little too baggy. He knew that he was going to have to fix his wardrobe situation EVENTUALLY, he just was very invested in putting that off for as long as he possibly could.

Steve hated shopping, he really did. Much more so when he remembered that it was the same mall Tommy and Carol frequented, and he really wasn't ready to confront that mess. There were benefits to realizing you're trans in the middle of summer. One of those benefits was that his popular friends lived far, and they didn't like making the trip to his house in the woods just to hang out. This combined with the absence of school meant he never saw them.

It was the summer before his senior year of high school and he already knew it was gonna be a little rough. He wanted to be out at school. He couldn't take a year of that name. He knew he was gonna

be ditched by his popular friends and it would be hard for a while as people aren't nearly as accepting as they think they are. Maybe they'd all assume that he was a new student if he looked different enough walking through the front door. He thanked God that most of his teachers simply called out last names. Steve's eye coasted to the list of names he'd written on scrap paper.

"So....you're a trans guy," Barb repeated the words. The two of them were painting a wall tapestry for Nancy's birthday at the time.

"Yeah," Steve said, not looking up, "Nance said that you kind of...figured, but i thought it would be cool to like, have the discussion."

"How long have you known?" She asked.

"Eight weeks, give or take," Steve answered.

"Do you think you're gonna tell..." Barb trailed off and gestured slowly to Jonathon, sitting outside, taking pictures of something or other.

"Nah," Steve squinted.

"Nah?" Barb asked.

"Well, Jonathon and I aren't exactly best friends, if you couldn't guess," Steve scoffed.

"Neither were we at a point," Barb blinked at him.

It was true. The events of the previous October gave Barb every reason she needed to hate him. Secretly he judged her for NOT hating him. It had been an accident on a cold night with a bad party. The word accident made him cringe inwardly because it really had been a series of mistakes and not just one. But the point was that he'd shut her out of a party. She'd stuck around. It was 30 degrees out and freezing and she couldn't swim and no one was around.

“Are you alright? You haven’t said anything in like five minutes,” Barb raised an eyebrow. Steve looked down. Paint was dripping on his jeans.

“I guess so. Just thinking,” Steve shrugged.

“That was a while ago,” Barb pointed out, seemingly reading his mind.

“I know,” Steve thudded his head against the wall.

“If it wasn’t for that, we never would have become friends. In a way I’m kind of grateful,” Barb half smiled.

“Don’t say that. Don’t ever say that again,” Steve said sharply.

“Okay,” Barb looked stern. She placed a supportive hand on his shoulder, “if you don’t want to tell anyone, that’s your choice. And it’s a very reasonable one. I’m just saying that....for me. For me, it made me feel so much better to tell people. And the ways the two of us interact with gender might be completely different, but I’m here for you no matter what you decide.”

Steve hugged her tightly. It took her aback, but not in a bad way. Steve just wasn’t the best at trying to express his emotions.

“I want to be out,” Steve finally said, “I do. I’m just not crazy about the idea of COMING out, you know?”

“I know,” Barb sighed, “it’s pretty daunting, telling everyone. That’s something that I had to deal with, too. Of course I didn’t have as many friends as you do, and pretty much no one noticed outside of my family and Nancy knew.”

“Shit’s gonna suck when I tell Tommy and Carol,” Steve looked towards the window.

“Yeah, well, they’re shitty people,” Barb realized what she said and immediately tried to backtrack, “I mean. No they’re not, I guess I just haven’t seen their best sides yet.”

“No, they’re shit,” Steve laughed, “I’m glad I have you and Nancy at

least. You guys are the greatest.”

“We know,” Barb smiled. They were still hugging.

Steve couldn't even remember what they said to him that made his skin crawl or his eyes fill with tears. He couldn't make himself focus on the words they were saying. He just remembered feeling scared of what they were going to do when they ran out of words to shout at him. He just ran. And when he ran, he could feel the back of his shirt being yanked back by Tommy.

He couldn't remember how he got home or what time it was when he got there or if he said anything to his parents about it or if they asked. He couldn't remember how long he slept or how many days it was that he snuck out of his room every night at one in the morning to eat before crawling back into his room, never to be seen. He didn't WANT to be seen, after all.

He didn't remember, but if we're counting, it was eight days before Nancy's concern boiled up and she biked the hour to his house and managed inside through the unlocked sliding glass door next to the pool. The number of days is significant because it is the longest they have ever, EVER gone without talking since they met.

“Hey,” she said when she spotted his wrist dangling out from under his blanket. Steve snaked his hand under the covers.

“I brought you cookies,” she said after a while, “cookies and sprite.”

“Thanks,” Steve said. He couldn't not talk after that. He dropped his arm back out.

“Well, I'm not gonna talk to a disembodied hand, but I'm glad you're alive in there,” Nancy turned to leave. She felt the hand grab hers, and when she faced it, Steve sat up in bed.

“What's up?” Nancy asked, sitting down.

“Tommy and Carol are jerks,” Steve said plainly.

“Oh,” Nancy processed Steve’s vague statements like that more than sometimes even Steve could.

“Yeah. It’s not a big deal,” Steve sighed.

“How bad was it?” Nancy asked.

“Not great,” Steve didn’t want to go into detail and he knew Nancy wouldn’t pry. He took a coconut cookie out of the box and almost cried. He swore, something about cookies made him emotional. It was ridiculous.

“How are you feeling?” She asked. She knew it was a stupid question.

“I’ve almost thrown away my binder and new clothes every day. It seems so much...easier. To pretend to just be a cis straight girl,” Steve looked away.

“What stopped you?” Nancy’s voice was soft.

“You, kind of,” Steve answered.

“What?” Nancy looked concerned.

“Do you remember when Tommy shot that bird?” Steve asked.

“Yeah?” Her tone egged him on to elaborate.

“I think we need to visit where we buried it,” Steve blinked.

“Okay,” Nancy didn’t understand, but she knew it was important to him. She squeezed his hand as if to say ‘okay, let’s go’ and Steve looked at the corner of his room.

He remembered talking to Dustin shortly after telling Nancy and Barb. Dustin was out. He was proud, and thanks to his mom, his self discovery journey was a lot less painful. He remembered offering to take the kid to get a smoothie and Dustin being weirded out that one of his friend’s sister’s friends offering to take him for a smoothie, but

he accepted nonetheless.

He remembered how they somehow shifted the conversation to college, and how Steve said he was going to college somewhere far away from all the people he knew before, and how Dustin said that that was the dumbest thing he'd ever heard. Steve thought it was strange, but they did have completely different experiences growing up. Steve explained how his friends were transphobic and he said THAT was dumb too, how he was friends with people who would judge him like that.

Steve hadn't thought of it that way. He promised to consider colleges at least inside the state so that he could visit Nancy and Barb and yes, even Jonathon.

You think you're doing okay until you meet someone younger than you who has everything all figured out.

It took him thirty minutes to get it all into a box, and thirty minutes longer before they could get to the grave so he could explain it. Steve got out of the car after Nancy.

"Alright," she said, and crossed her arms. That said exactly what she was thinking. Steve looked down at the shoebox in his hands.

"I remember you saying how beautiful the bird was. It was a Goldfinch, I think you said? And I remember Tommy saying 'well I think it's annoying' and he pointed his dad's gun at it. I remember laughing, because I thought he was joking. But then he pulled the trigger and I couldn't take my eyes off of it falling. It wasn't so funny after that."

"Yeah?" Nancy took a step towards him.

"I remember how you told him off, and how he didn't want to stick around after that. I never told you this, but after we buried him in that shoebox, I went home and cried all night long," Steve continued, "all I could think of was how if I had agreed with you, about how the

bird was beautiful, he wouldn't have shot it. Not because he thinks highly of me, but because when two people gang up on you and tell you what you're doing is gross, it's harder to argue because you're outnumbered. But I didn't. I laughed. And now the bird is dead."

"Oh," Nancy looked down.

"I've visited the bird a lot lately. Not because I feel guilty but because I kinda feel close to that bird, you know? Like that bird was singing and doing so great and for all we know it had babies but Tommy saw it and decided that because HE didn't like the bird, it was okay for him to end its life. Like Tommy thinks he was God to this bird. It made him feel powerful to shoot it, and I hated that. Still do," Steve shivered, "but you called it beautiful, and if I had too, the bird might still be alive."

"And you think this is like that?" Nancy asked.

"I think a lot of things are like that," Steve looked at her, "Tommy thinks HE'S in charge of how everyone and everything around him should behave. Until he's proven wrong by you. You're so strong and brave and every single day I wish I was more like you."

"Oh, Buddy," Nancy put a hand on his shoulder. She had taken a liking to calling Steve 'Buddy'. He didn't know where it came from.

"So," Steve straightened his back, "I wrote my name and pronouns on a scrap of paper. I gathered all the photos, physical ones anyway, with Tommy and Carol or any of my other popular friends, and even some of my old clothes. I put them in a box. And I want to give it a proper resting place. Because even though it's not 'me' It's still a part of me. Do you know why?"

"No, why?"

"Because if I get shot down, I want to know what it's like to be free and open for once in my fucking life. And the reason I wanted you here when I did that," Steve paused, "is because Tommy and Carol are.....were...my friends. But so were you. I'm strong enough to do this because of you."

"I'm honored," Nancy smiled.

"You shouldn't be. I'm talking like a dork," Steve tried not to look sheepish.

"No, I think I understand why you have to do this. It's cool how you're doing this. You did make sure the box was biodegradable though, right?"

"Yeah," Steve laughed.

And so the two of them found a good spot and dug a hole with their hands barely big enough to contain the box. When they finished, the two stood up and stared at it.

"If anyone finds this, they're gonna think an aspiring serial killer put together that box," Steve said.

"An aspiring serial killer who sucks at grave digging," Nancy added, "so, the burial of your legal name. Does that mean that you've picked one yet?"

"Yes, I have," Steve answered. There was a lot of thought that went into it. He thought the name might be cliché. But standing there with Nancy in front of not one, but two shoebox graves, he knew it was perfect.

"Let's hear it, then."

"I'm thinking.....Steve."

"Steve it is then," and she squeezed his hand, tight.

Author's Note:

.....Hi I'm projecting

This is ultimately a story dedicated to myself and someone else who's extremely special to me. this is also dedicated to all other trans dudes who struggled with their identity more than they would have liked. This is for you.

If you like what you read, please consider checking

out my comic:

<https://jezandcalseternaladventure.tumblr.com/>

here's where you can find me on tumblr

<http://moonsofmercury.tumblr.com/>

Here's my art blog just for shits and giggles

<https://sunsofsaturn.tumblr.com/>